Big Anthony and the Magic Ring

STORY AND PICTURES BY

Tomie de Paola

$7.95

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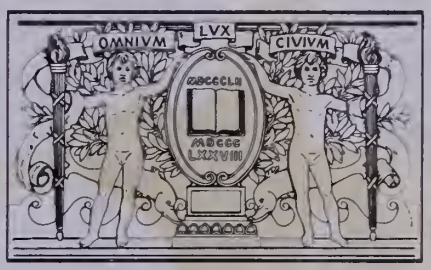
Following the folk tradition of storytelling, Tomie de Paola has created a new story, featuring his original characters STREGA NONA and BIG ANTHONY and introducing BAMBOLONA!

When springtime arrives in the little town of Calabria, Strega Nona (Grandmother Witch) notices that her helper Big Anthony is less attentive than usual to his chores. "What you need is a little Night Life," she advises him. How her advice and, of course, a little of her magic conspire to raise Big Anthony's spring fever to an alarming degree will delight old fans and create new ones when they are introduced to Tomie de Paola's warm, zany world of human nature and its foibles.



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Big Anthony and the Magic Ring

STORY AND PICTURES BY Tomie de Paola

HARCOURT BRACE JOVANOVICH
NEW YORK AND LONDON

For
Paola Risposio
who introduced me
to Bambolona

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757 Third Avenue, New York, New York 10017

Printed in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
De Paola, Thomas Anthony.
Big Anthony and the magic ring.
SUMMARY: When Big Anthony borrows Strega Nona's magic ring to turn himself into a handsome man, he gets more trouble than fun.
[1. Magic—Fiction] I. Title.
PZ7.D439Bg [E] 78-23631
ISBN 0-15-207124-5
ISBN 0-15-611907-2 pbk.

First edition
B C D E

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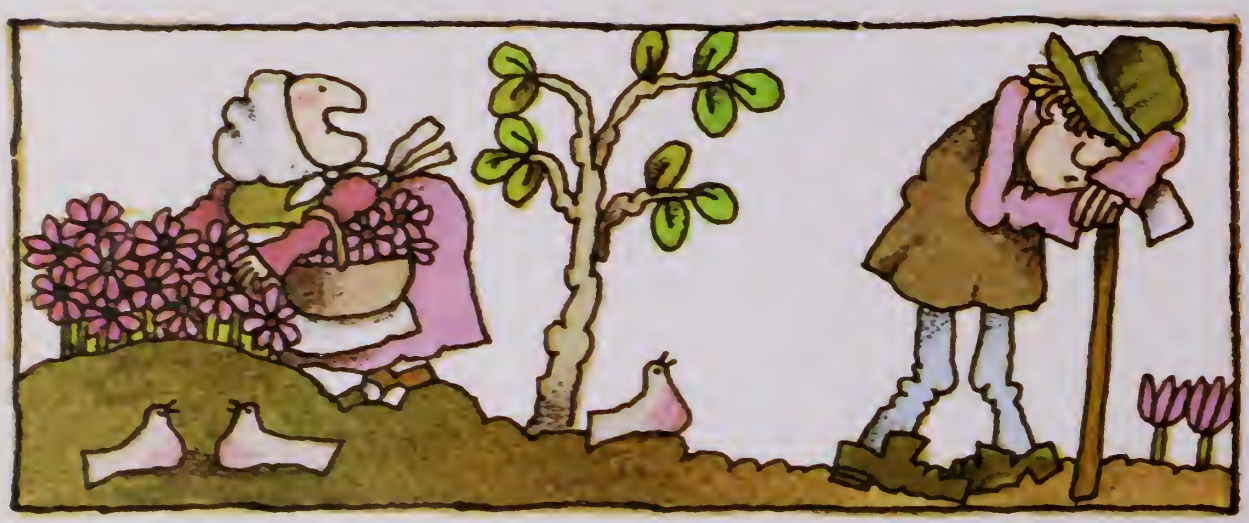
8810974

Wintertime was very quiet in the little town in Calabria where Strega Nona (Grandma Witch) and her helper Big Anthony lived. People came to Strega Nona to help them solve their troubles. Big Anthony did his chores and tried to behave himself. And every morning Bambolona, the baker's daughter, came to deliver the bread.

One day the sun began to shine a little brighter, the birds began to sing a little sweeter, and the flowers began to bloom everywhere. Spring had come, and Big Anthony began to drag his feet.



"Anthony," said Strega Nona, "whatever is the matter? You're sleeping late. Your chores are half done, and every time I look at you, you're gazing into space and sighing."
"Oh, Strega Nona, I don't know what's wrong with me," said Big Anthony. "Everything in my head is fuzzy."

"I think you have spring fever," said Strega Nona. "What you need is a little Night Life. Why don't you go to the village dance tonight? It would perk you up."

Big Anthony sighed again. "The village seems so far away," he said. "And anyway, who would dance with *me?*"

"Bambolona, the baker's daughter, would," said Strega Nona. "Why don't you ask her when she brings the bread?"

"Who?" asked Big Anthony (for in truth he had never noticed her).

When supper was finished and Strega Nona was straightening up her cupboard, she suddenly stopped and said to herself, "Ummm. A little Night Life. That's not a bad idea. It's been quite a while since *I* went to the village and danced the tarantella."

Then she began to bang the little drawers open and shut, looking into each of them.

The noise startled Big Anthony, who was sitting just outside gazing at the moon.

"What is Strega Nona doing?" he asked himself, peeking through a crack in the door.

"Aha, here it is," said Strega Nona, holding up a tiny golden ring. "I haven't used this in years."

She slipped the ring on the first finger of her right hand and then began to sing:

"O little band, my golden ring,
Listen to the song I sing.
Make me look as I do not,
And to the village dance I'll trot."

There was a puff of smoke, and instead of Strega Nona, there stood a beautiful lady, in elegant clothes!

Big Anthony could hardly believe his eyes.

Secretly, Big Anthony followed the beautiful lady all the way to the village square . . .

and there he watched her dance the tarantella
all night long.

When the dance was over, Big Anthony followed her back to Strega Nona's house. There the lady sang:

"O shiny band, my golden ring,
Again the little song I sing.
The dance is done, the moon does wane.
Turn me back to me again."

Then she slipped the ring off her finger.

With a puff of smoke, there was Strega Nona! "Oh," whispered Big Anthony, "if only I could get that ring. I would be the handsomest man in all of Calabria, and all the village ladies would want to dance with me."

Big Anthony decided to wait for his chance—which came the very next morning, after Bambolona brought the bread.

"Anthony, I must go and visit my godchildren," said Strega Nona, "now that it's Eastertide. Be a good *ragazzo,* stay out of trouble, do your chores, and don't drag your feet."
"Sì, yes, Strega Nona," said Big Anthony.

All day long Big Anthony waited. Finally, when the sun went down, he ran inside and rummaged through the drawers of Strega Nona's magic cupboard until he found the tiny golden ring.

He pushed it on the first finger of his right hand as far as it would go. Then he sang;

"O little band, my golden ring,
Listen to the song I sing.
Make me look as I do not
And to the village dance I'll trot."

There was a puff of smoke. Big Anthony rushed to the mirror and looked. The face looking back at him was certainly not his own. There stood a *Handsome* Big Anthony in elegant clothes.

"Aha," shouted Handsome Big Anthony, "and now for a little Night Life!"

When he strolled into the village, everyone was dancing the tarantella in the middle of the square.

In a second, Handsome Big Anthony was surrounded by all the ladies there—young and old, fat and thin, pretty and not so pretty. They had never seen such a *handsome* man in all their lives.

"Come dance with me," each of them cried, pulling at his arms.

Round and round they went, dancing the tarantella.

So this is a little Night Life, thought Handsome Big Anthony happily.

After several hours Handsome Big Anthony was beginning to get a little tired, but the ladies wouldn't let him stop dancing.

"Caro," they cried, "dance with me! Me, *caro,* next!" and they began to push and shove.

They pushed and shoved so much that at last Handsome Big Anthony got scared.

"Un momento—just a minute! Let me catch my breath," he cried.

But the pushing and shoving and grabbing and kissing only went on more. Handsome Big Anthony began to run.

The ladies began to run too. After him.

Handsome Big Anthony stopped and sang:

"O shiny band, my golden ring,
Again the little song I sing.
The dance is done, the moon does wane.
Turn me back to me again. *Please.*"

Then he tried to take off the ring, but it stuck fast. *"Mamma mia,"* he cried. "What am I going to do?"

Past the fountain, past the priest, past the sisters of the convent on their way to prayers he ran . . .

Out through the gate—past the goats—into the countryside. "Me! Me! Dance with me! *Amore!*" cried the ladies, close behind.

Handsome Big Anthony continued to run. Again he sang the song, although he was out of breath. Again he tugged at the ring. But it wouldn't budge.

At last, he climbed a cypress tree. Up to the very top.

Now he had nowhere to go.

"Help! Save me! Help!" he cried. And he sang some more and tugged some more. But it did no good.

The ladies reached the tree and shook it hard. Shook and shook and shook it.
"Come down, you handsome devil, you! Dance with us some more. With Maria! Concetta! Clorinda! Rosanna! Theresa! Francesca! Clotilda!" they cried.

Finally they shook the tree so hard that Handsome Big Anthony lost his grip and flew into the air.
"Oh no!" he cried. "Now they'll get me for sure!"

He landed on his handsome big nose right in
front of a little house—Strega Nona's house.

And Strega Nona was home from her visit.
It didn't take her the time to blow three kisses
to see what had happened.

"Anthony," she said, "where did you get my magic ring?"
"Oh, Strega Nona, help me please. I only wanted a little fun. Just a little Night Life. I sang the song, but the ring is stuck. What am I to do? Here they come—they're after me! Please, make me *me* again."

Strega Nona opened a flagon of olive oil and rubbed some on his finger.

"Now," she said, "SING!"

Handsome Big Anthony loudly sang:

"O shiny band, my golden ring,
Again the little song I sing.
The dance is done, the moon does wane.
Turn me back to me again."

The ring slipped off his finger, and when the puff of smoke had cleared, there sat—plain Big Anthony.

"Where is he? Oh, where did he go? Where is that handsome devil?" cried the ladies from the village.

"There's no one here as you can see but me and Big Anthony," said Strega Nona.

Calling "Wait, wait, wait for us," the ladies rushed away. And soon they were out of sight.

"Oh, Anthony," said Strega Nona. "You will never learn!"

"Strega Nona, you saved my life. Never again I promise—never will I touch your magic," cried Big Anthony.

"Never mind, Big Anthony," said Strega Nona with a smile. "There are other kinds of magic in the spring."

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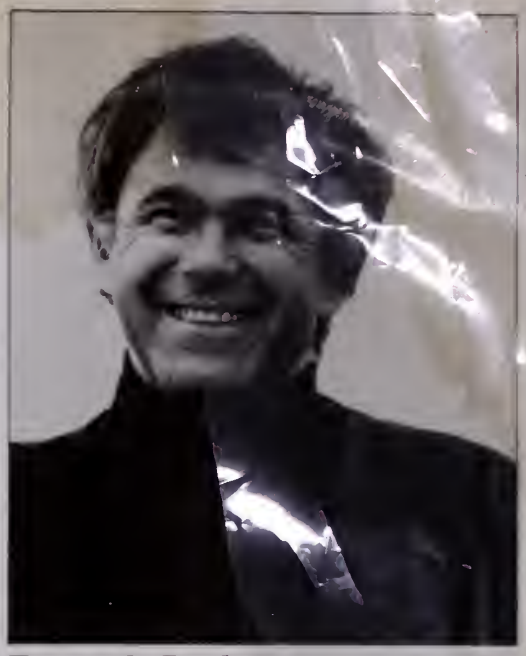

Photo: Bruce Scully

Tomie de Paola is internationally known for his books for children, and his STREGA NONA was a Caldecott Honor book. Working on its sequel (BIG ANTHONY AND THE MAGIC RING) was a joyful experience, he writes "rather like visiting one's old dear friends after a long time away."

Born in Meriden, Connecticut, Mr. de Paola later studied at Pratt Institute and is professor in the Visual Arts Department of New England College in Henniker, New Hampshire. He lives in a one-hundred-year-old farmhouse in Wilmot Flat, New Hampshire.

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